

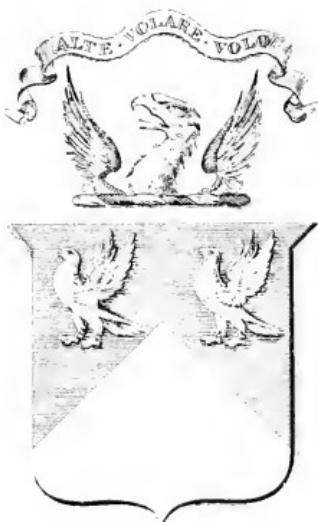
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**T**HIE CITY OF DREAD  
NIGHT BY JAMES  
SON WITH INTROD.  
BY E. CAVAZZA

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University of California







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THE  
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

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JAMES THOMSON

MR. THOMAS B. MOSHER having acquired from us  
as proprietors of the copyright of the late JAMES  
THOMSON the American right for issuing a limited  
edition of *The City of Dreadful Night*, it is our  
wish that with him alone the reprinting of the poem  
should remain.

BERTRAM DOBELL.

WILLIAM D. REEVES.

LONDON, July 25th, 1892.

*Only Four Hundred copies of this Small Paper Edition  
(Post 8vo.) have been printed. Each copy numbered,  
and the type distributed.*

*No. 29*

"PAST IS THE FEAR OF FUTURE DOUBT,  
THE SUN IS FROM THE DIAL GONE,  
THE SANDS ARE SUNK, THE GLASS IS OUT,  
THE FOLLY OF THE FARCE IS DONE."

FOLIO, 1818

THE CITY OF DREADFUL  
NIGHT BY JAMES THOM-  
SON WITH INTRODUCTION  
BY E. CAVAZZA

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## **INTRODUCTION**



## INTRODUCTION.

**T**HE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT is a poem of pessimism, which, neither widely read nor popular, has, however, a twofold value as a document of humanity and as an extraordinarily thorough and vivid representation of a sole, overmastering mood undesirable but undeniable. Pessimism — whether it casts an occasional passing shadow upon the mind, as happens to most persons; or whether, as in rarer cases, it hangs a persistent gloomy fog between a soul and the sunlight — always belongs to the pathology of spirit and flesh interwoven. It is too often a malady, subtle and terrible, a rational madness, a paralysis of the soul, a nyctalopic sight which sees objects clearly defined, black upon black, in a lightless atmosphere. Such a death in life we are bound to pity. We ought to try to comprehend, while we marvel at the spirit that continually makes the great refusal of the abundant delights of the moment and of the instincts and analogies which, assuring of a future good, speak in

a manner unanswerable by the dialectics of materialism.

In order to understand the utterances of a sincere pessimist we must seek for a cause more remote and intricate than the disillusionments or the misfortunes which the sufferer himself is apt to blame for his misery. For it is not those most sharply or heavily afflicted who fall into chronic melancholy. It is not a past cataclysm, but instead a natural poverty of soil which results in rank weeds only and cruel thorns. Upon the slopes of Etna, many times ruined by fiery streams — the lava, after a while that it lies under the sun, breaks into mellow earth, plenteous of olives, vines and corn.

The incurable physical sufferings of Leopardi and of Heine readily and sufficiently account for their pessimism expressed in poetry; the one was like a divine, sad nightingale, singing amid a moonless grove, the other had in his sophisticated song the mocking-bird's cries and laughter, broken and feverishly alternated.

We shall hardly be able to read justly *The City of Dreadful Night*, the unique and startling embodiment of the convictions of James Thomson, without some

rapid inquiry into the causes of the prevalent attitude of his mind. His was a sensitive, high-strung temperament in prey to one relentless mood, which for many years visited him with increasing frequency and power, until it obtained over him complete mastery. The tragic obsession was not, indeed, without moments of truce; but these appear excited and insecure — like the respite given to the victim of a tiger's play.

Of a malady, searching and gradual as this which invaded the spirit of James Thomson, it is not possible to make a diagnosis other than generalized and tentative; for we must be aware that factors may have existed which could throw out the whole calculation. His inheritance from a mother of sad temperament and austere creed, and from a father more or less dipsomaniac, would appear to give reason enough for his hypochondria and melancholy. The Scottish quality of his intellect, persistent and argumentative, and of his wild and haunted fantasy, rendered him ready to accept the report of the nerves which, themselves unstrung, found in the universe only a clash and jangle of false notes, a confusion of chords without

key or resolution. Such a nature as Thomson's might easily fall, by its own gravitation, into despairing pessimism. His reason admitted nothing beyond the limits of its own research; his imagination, strong enough to supply his theories with startlingly concrete illustrations, did not avail to initiate for him any comforts or hopes. By some curious, clear glimpse of criticism he has defined the state of his spirit with almost scientific precision, in course of the poem which we are about to read:

What men are they who haunt these fatal glooms?  
They have much wisdom, yet they are not wise,  
They have much goodness, yet they do not well . . .  
They are most rational and yet insane;  
An outward madness not to be controlled;  
A perfect reason in the central brain,  
Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,  
And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly  
The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly  
To cheat itself, refusing to behold.

In this piteous vivisection it may not be overfanciful to recognize the peculiar second-sight of the poet's self, his double met face to face. This vivid division of personality — said to be a symptom of unsoundness of brain — appears in other examples, still more marked, in the imagery of *The City of Dreadful Night*.

Thomson himself believed that the one cause of his long and ever-deepening misery was the death of his betrothed, Matilda Weller, a beautiful girl hardly beyond childhood. A similar experience befell Novalis, as is known; and in honor of this correspondence in grief, Thomson assumed as part of his pseudonym the anagram Vanolis. Bysshe Vanolis was the name which he chose for himself, and he desired that his publications should be signed merely with the initials B. V.

In regard to the effect of the early sorrow upon Thomson's view of life, Carlyle's criticism upon the case of Novalis need not be cited here; but preferably that of an essayist who wrote directly concerning Thomson :—

I do not agree . . . as regarding this bereavement as the cause of his lifelong misery. She was, I hold, merely the peg on which he hung his raiment of sorrow; without her, another object might have served the same purpose. He carried with him his proper curse, constitutional melancholia.  
*H. W. Fiske*

At the same time must be admitted the judicious observation of Thomson's biographer, Mr. H. S. Salt, who believes that the death of the young girl, more than any other single circumstance, "fostered and

developed the malady to which Thomson was perhaps predisposed."

Another memorialist, Mr. Bertram Dobell, suggests that Thomson had "much in him, in fact, of the self-torturing spirit which afflicted Rousseau, and which drove Cowper into insanity."

For consciousness turned in against itself there is no defence; this intimate warfare means total defeat; and the longer the resistance the slower the torment and the devastation.

Were these few pages the preface to a volume which should represent the various themes and moods expressed by the entire range of Thomson's writings, it would be opportune to do more than merely hint at the sensitive capacity for enjoyment, the affectionate and companionable traits of the man, the loyal friendships which he inspired, and the energetic — yet half-hearted and intermittent — efforts made by him against the forces of outward conditions, inward discouragements, and the unfortunate habit inherited from his father, which from time to time overtaking him, became at last the means of a slow, not unwilling, suicide.

But it is a single poem, *The City of*

*Dreadful Night* (with, as illustration, *To our Ladies of Death and Insomnia*, the latter commenting upon it in its own tonality) that I am invited to present to American readers. This, then, is the time and place for appreciation of the unique and sinister beauty of a work that has called forth the praise of such artists as Swinburne, Rossetti, Philip Bourke Marston, while on this side of the Atlantic, Longfellow and Emerson expressed their interest in its fame. Under the darkness of deep waters, within the shell of pessimism, grew this rare product of disease, the black pearl of poetry that is named *The City of Dreadful Night*.

Although this poem is justly to be considered as the definitive word of James Thomson's criticism of life, as well as the crowning example of his literary art, it would be unfair to ignore the testimony contained in a note addressed by him to George Eliot, in sending to her a copy of the book:

The poem in question (he wrote to her) was the result of sleepless hypochondria. I am aware that the truth of midnight does not exclude the truth of noonday, though one's nature may lead him to dwell in the former rather than the latter.

But in the time that he was writing the poem, for him the noonday was as though it never had been. The work has the tremendous vividness of utter possession by one fixed idea. The powers of darkness have created, saying, Let there not be light.

*The City of Dreadful Night* was imagined during a sojourn in London, where the environment and the climate added to the depression of Thomson's spirits. In order to find some relief from the conscious nightmare of insomnia he was

Constrained to move through the unmoving hours,  
Accursed from rest because the hours stood still.

He walked the streets of London, silent and lonely in the darkness of midnight, or stood upon the bridge looking down into the black, sullen waters, until the dawn sent him shivering to his house. These are the scenes which reappear in the City of Night and its River of the Suicides. The dismal town is, indeed, a *fata morgana* of London projected upon a cloud. Its architecture is the frozen music of a dead march heard in the insomnia that has the illusions without the repose of dreams.

This city was not built in a day; its con-

structor had served a long apprenticeship before he reared the image of the goddess Melancholia upon the pedestal. For James Thomson all roads led to this Rome, the capital of the empire of the Inane. He had written, at the age of twenty-three, "The Doom of a City," an allegory (as Mr. Salt defines it) of the stony insensibility of the human heart when numbed by destiny and despair. The motive was taken from the petrified city of one of the Arabian Nights' tales. In The Festival of Life, interrupted by two masks of Death kindly or cruel; in the wild utterances of the Mater Tenebrarum, the composed solemnity of Our Ladies of Death, or the funereal descriptions of the shadowy abode of the Lady of Sorrow—the imagination of Thomson was always approaching its ideal and reinforcing its art for the masterwork of the *The City of Dreadful Night*.

In the poem is announced the double purpose of the allegory: "To show the bitter, old and naked truth" as it appears to the view of the pessimist, and to console in some degree the brethren of the great "Freemasonry of Sorrow," by the grip and password of initiate sympathy. And there is a tinge of satisfaction and exclusiveness

in the poet's declaration that none who have content or hope for reason of this world or the other, could "read the writing if they deigned to try." Surely there are few persons who have not learned by experience of sorrow, even though refusing to let one's individual cloud discredit the sun. The attempt may be modestly made, at least, to spell out the hyacinthine hieroglyphics that inscribe woe upon the pages of the poem. And it may be that non-persuasion will leave the reader more at liberty to appreciate its extraordinary literary merit.

The atmosphere of *The City of Dreadful Night* is symbolic of the unrelieved gloom of pessimism; its dwellers typify those who habitually despond, admitting no consolation or hope. The poet asserts the power of hypochondria to materialize its frightful imaginings.

But when a dream night after night is brought  
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many  
Recur each year for several years, can any  
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

The simple verity of the pathetic plea cannot fail to awaken compassion for the sufferings of Thomson and admiration of

the literary art which could so steadily depict the images of his vast discouragement.

The scenery of the city is varied; the sul- len lagoon and marsh, the savage forests and the torrents running downward through black ravines, are its sombre environment, allegorical of despair in its apathetic or its violent forms. The streets of the city are lined with ancient ruins or with houses in-habited, but showing no light through their black casements. Only the street lamps burn — as Thomson saw them, a perspec-tive of innumerable points of sharp fire, as he walked through London at night.

"The City is of Night but not of Sleep," it is the home of insomnia, with all its at-tendant terrors. We may not overlook the pathological origin of the poem. The tech-nical construction of the allegory includes a principal verse-form employed in the pas-sages which describe the common doom of the people, hopeless under the hand of Necessity. Its metre is a seven-line stanza, to which the double rhymes of the fifth and sixth lines give a peculiar tender-ness. In the episodes, where individuals are heard as the spokesmen of a whole sad company, various metres are adopted with appropriateness to the passion expressed.

The general design is at once elaborate and somewhat fragmentary: a series of powerful visions, not without mathematical correspondences of structure, convey the allegory.

Despair is above all egoistic; therefore every figure met by the poet in those forlorn streets is an image of himself, and gives voice to one or another phase of his mood. The first of these citizens is a man whose faith was buried in a graveyard, and whose love and hope were departed in their turn. He remains deprived of all aim in life, which for him runs on like the mechanism of a watch without dial or hands.

The poet describes the new power of his visual nerve by which he can perceive "a stir of black in blackness," and the sharpened hearing that reports the pulsations of silence. Then he comes upon a man who is relating to a shadowy crowd of listeners his strange journey: each stanza is introduced by the impressive repetition:

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert.

(Perhaps there is no need to point out a degree of resemblance of this episode to Browning's *Hilde Roland*. Thomson was receptive and even imitative, yet had no

lack of vigorous originality which was able to give a new stamp to his borrowings.) There in the waste land, among the savage crags of a wild seacoast, between a burnt-out sun and a fallen moon, the traveler meets a woman, carrying in her hand a red lamp, which is no less than her own burning heart. She has been identified by Mr. Salt as "the phantom-figure of the lost love" of the poet: and this interpretation has the double authority of intelligence and of affection. But it is not easy to imagine the transformation of the golden-haired child into this tragic woman. Rather, the lamp-bearer appears like a demi-goddess, a Lady of Death, who carries away her lover's self from himself, in a mad division of identity.

Next, the poet overhears a dialogue of two persons who have failed of admittance at the gates of death because they lacked the coin of the toll—a last hope to leave behind. Another pair reason concerning Fate, whether she is malign, a hater of men, or simply indifferent. Then with noise of heavy wheels and clangor of iron-shod hoofs, as in the London streets, great wains go by, bearing away,—who knows?—all the good that might have been for mankind.

Now the wanderer approaches a house, draped with black, from whose windows — alone of all the city — streams a light of funeral lamps. This episode is another reference to the story in the Arabian Nights which so deeply impressed Thomson. In the oratory of this house of mourning, of which every room holds a shrine where tapers burn before a statue or a picture of the same woman, "very young and very fair" a youth kneels praying beside the bier where lies the dead Lady of the Images. In this *chapelle ardente* is the celebration of the early sorrow of the poet, the worship of the love that he had not the strength to lift up from the earth to the stars.

In a remarkable passage, to which reference has already been made, the poet anatomizes the melancholy of the "rational and yet insane" dwellers in the City of Night. Now they at the door of the great cathedral of their town attest each his right to citizenship, since they from the illusions of power, art, wealth, virtue, vice, knowledge, patriotism, "wake from daydreams to this real night."

Within the sinister temple the poet meditates upon the folly of those who, hating time, yet crave eternity; and then hears

the voice of the preacher who bids his sad people take comfort from the assurance of the oblivion of the tomb, and declares that Fate knows neither favor nor wrath. One in the congregation persists in arraigning life for the chances of happiness proffered and frustrated, to which the preacher can only repeat his doctrine of oblivion. The poet, ranging in thought among other spheres, finds only infinite room for despair and for compassion. He returns to the sights of the City where he perceives a man groping upon the ground in search of the golden clue that shall lead him backward to the day of his birth; others seek the lethal river of the suicides.

The succeeding allegory is very impressive, which depicts the struggle of mankind against Fate, and the resultant defeat and dejection. The cathedral is flooded now with moonlight; in the open space before it crouches a Sphinx, half in shadow, while an angel all in the full white splendor, confronts the creature. In the first shock of conflict the wings of the angel fall shattered. He remains an armed warrior, but his sword is broken at the second encounter. Lastly, he is a defenseless man, praying with uplifted hands, and is crushed

XXVIII      INTRODUCTION.

by the unalterable sphinx. These metamorphoses as Mr. Salt has well interpreted them may be taken to represent the three phases through which the poet's mind had passed in relation to the mysteries of existence: first, the exaltation of religious belief; then the self-reliance of philosophy; then the hopelessness of complete despair.

To the northward of the City of Dreadful Night the bronze image of its tutelar goddess sits upon a granite pedestal. She is the tremendous Melancholia of Albrecht Dürer, surrounded by the emblems of every human science; she has toiled and is baffled at the end of the day, and the denial of all things is in her eyes. To her the dwellers of the tenebrous town look to obtain new endurance or new terrors. She confirms to all the old despair.

In the magnificent eleven stanzas which describe this defeated Titan woman may be found the summing-up of James Thomson's whole philosophy of pessimism, expressed with a fury of conviction able to fuse the material into one great image, unique and memorable.

E. CAVAZZA.

NOVEMBER, 1892.

THE  
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

1870 : 1874.

"Per me si va nella città dolente."

— DANTE

"Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti  
D'ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,  
Girando senza posa,  
Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse,  
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto  
Indovinar non so."

—  
"Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volge  
Ogni creata cosa,  
In te, morte, si posa  
Nostra ignuda natura;  
Leta no, ma sicura  
Dell' antico dolor. . . .  
Però ch' esser beato  
Nega ai mortali e nega a' morti il fato."

— LEOPARDI

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THE  
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT.

1870; 1874.

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PROEM.

O, thus, as prostrate, "In the dust I write  
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears."  
Yet why evoke the spectres of black night  
To blot the sunshine of exultant years ?  
Why disinter ~~dead~~ faith from mouldering hidden ?  
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,  
And wail life's discords into careless ears ?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles  
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth  
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,  
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth ;  
Because it gives some sense of power and passion  
In helpless impotence to try to fashion  
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,  
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,  
Or such as pasture and grow fat among  
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth  
Or pious spirits with a God above them  
To sanctify and glorify and love them,  
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these  
Could read the writing if they deigned to try  
So may they flourish, in their due degrees.

On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky,  
If any cares for the weak words here written,  
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,  
Whose faith and hope are dead, and who would dia

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer  
In that same city of tremendous night,  
Will understand the speech, and feel a stir  
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight;  
I suffer mute and lonely, yet another  
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother  
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight."

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold  
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore?  
Nay, be assured; no secret can be told  
To any who divined it not before:  
None uninitiate by many a presage  
Will comprehend the language of the message,  
Although proclaimed aloud forevermore.

## I

THE City is of Night; perchance of Death,  
But certainly of Night; for never there  
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath

After the dewy dawning's cold grey air;  
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;  
The sun has never visited that city,  
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away;  
Though present in distempered gloom of thought  
And deadly weariness of heart all day.

But when a dream night after night is brought  
Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many  
Recur each year for several years, can any  
Discern that dream from real life in aught?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,  
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night

And some by day, some night and day : we learn,  
The while all change and many vanish quite,  
In their recurrence with recurrent changes  
A certain seeming order ; where this ranges  
We count things real ; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,  
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,  
Regurgiting with the salt tides from the mouth ;  
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon  
For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges ;  
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,  
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large,  
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest  
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.  
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,  
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,  
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains ;  
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

The city is not ruinous, although  
Great ruins of an unremembered past,  
With others of a few short ~~years~~ ago  
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.  
The street-lamps always burn ; but scarce a casement  
In house or palace front from roof to basement  
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,  
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense  
Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.  
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense  
Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping :  
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,  
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence !

Yet as in some necropolis you find  
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,  
So there ; worn faces that look deaf and blind  
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,  
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,

Or sit foredone and desolately ponder  
Through sleepless ~~hours~~ with heavy drooping head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,  
A woman rarely, now and then a child :  
A child ! If here the heart turns sick with ruth  
To see a little one from birth defiled,  
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish  
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with anguish  
To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak  
To one another seldom, for their woe  
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak  
Itself abroad ; and if at whiles it grow  
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,  
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,  
To rave in turn, who lends attentive show. *Eccentricity  
of despair*

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep ;  
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain ;

The pitiless hours like years and ages creep.

A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain  
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,  
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,  
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

They leave all hope behind who enter there :

One certitude while sane they cannot leave,  
One anodyne for torture and despair ;  
The certitude of Death, which no reprieve  
Can put off long ; and which, divinely tender,  
But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render  
That draught whose slumber nothing can bereave.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Though the Garden of thy Life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit-trees barren, over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will.

II

**B**ECAUSE he seemed to walk with an intent  
I followed him ; who, shadowlike and frail,  
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,  
    Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil :  
Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet  
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused : a black mass in the gloom,  
    A tower that merged into the heavy sky ;  
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb :  
    Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty :  
He murmured to himself with dull despair,  
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more,  
    And travelled weary roads without suspense ;  
And reached at last a low wall's open door,  
    Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense :

He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,  
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,  
And travelled streets and lanes with wondrous strength  
Until on stooping through a narrow arch  
We stood before a squalid house at length :  
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,  
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,  
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs  
Of desolation I had seen and heard  
In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines :  
When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,  
Can Life still live ? By what doth it proceed ?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,  
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase  
The signs and figures of the circling hours,  
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face ;

The works proceed until run down ; although  
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

Then turning to the right paced on again,  
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose glooms  
Seemed more and more familiar to my ken ;  
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs ;  
And paused to murmur with the old despair,  
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt  
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife :  
He circled thus forever tracing out  
The series of the fraction left of Life ;  
Perpetual recurrence in the scope  
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Life divided by that persistent three =  $\frac{LXX}{333} = .210$

## III

A LTHOUGH lamps burn along the silent streets ;  
Even when moonlight silvers empty squares  
The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats ;  
But when the night its sphereless mantle wears  
The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,  
The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,  
The lanes are black as subterranean lairs.

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns :  
The night remains for it as dark and dense,  
Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns  
As in the daylight with its natural sense ;  
Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,  
Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,  
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep  
Becomes familiar though unreconciled ;

Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,  
And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,  
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision ;  
But all more dubious than the things of vision,  
So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,  
But wonder ceases soon ; the weirdest thing  
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law  
Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king ;  
Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,  
Dazed with such mysteries of woe and error,  
The soul is too outworn for wondering.

## IV

**H**E stood alone within the spacious square  
Declaiming from the central grassy mound,  
With head uncovered and with streaming hair,  
As if large multitudes were gathered round :  
A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,  
The glances burning with unnatural light : —

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert : All was black,  
In heaven no single star, on earth no track ;  
A brooding hush without a stir or note,  
The air so thick it clotted in my throat ;  
And thus for hours ; then some enormous things  
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings :  
But I strode on austere ;  
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: Eyes of fire  
Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire;  
The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath  
Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death;  
Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold  
Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold:

But I strode on austere;  
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: Lo you, there,  
That hillock burning with a brazen glare;  
Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow  
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro;  
A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell  
For Devil's roll-call and some *fête* of Hell:

Yet I strode on austere;  
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert : Meteors ran  
And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span ;  
The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,  
The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame ;  
The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged  
And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged :

Yet I strode on austere ;  
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert : Air once more,  
And I was close upon a wild sea-shore ;  
Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,  
The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand ;  
White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept and flew ;  
The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue :

And I strode on austere ;  
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: On the left  
The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft;  
There stopped and burned out black, except a rim,  
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim;  
Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,  
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest:

Still I strode on austere;  
No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: From the right  
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light;  
A woman with a red lamp in her hand,  
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand;  
O desolation moving with such grace!  
O anguish with such beauty in thy face!

I fell as on my bier,  
Hope travailed with such fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: I was twain,  
Two selves distinct that cannot join again;  
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,  
And watched the other stark in swoon and her;  
And she came on, and never turned aside,  
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide:

And as she came more near  
My soul grew mad with fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: Hell is mild  
And piteous matched with that accursèd wild;  
A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,  
A broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud;  
That lamp she held was her own burning heart,  
Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart:

The mystery was clear;  
Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert : By the sea  
She knelt and bent above that senseless me ;  
Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,  
She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair ;  
She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,  
She heeded not the level rushing flow :  
  
And mad with rage and fear,  
I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert : When the tide  
Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,  
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne  
Away, and this vile me was left forlorn ;  
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,  
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart :  
  
They love ; their doom is drear,  
Yet they nor hope nor fear ;  
But I, what do I here ?

## V

**H**OW he arrives there none can clearly know ;  
Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,  
Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,  
    Or down the river's boiling cataracts :  
To reach it is as dying fever-stricken ;  
To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken ;  
    And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

But being there one feels a citizen ;  
Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn :  
Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again ?  
    And yet release does come ; there comes a morn  
When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly  
That all the world is changed for him completely,  
    And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,  
He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst ;

Never again will he approach the range  
Infected by that evil spell now burst :  
Poor wretch ! who once hath paced that dolent city  
Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,  
With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,  
A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,  
And love them more than death or happy life,  
They shall avail not ; he must implore his weird ;  
Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,  
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,  
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared.

## VI

I sat forlornly by the river-side,  
And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden stars  
Above the blackness of the swelling tide,  
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier bars ;  
And heard the heave and plashing of the flow  
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk ;  
And under one, a few steps from my seat,  
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,  
Although I had not heard approaching feet :  
These bodiless voices in my waking dream  
Flowed dark words blending with the sombre stream :—

And you have after all come back; come back.  
I was about to follow on your track.  
And you have failed: our spark of hope is black.

That I have failed is proved by my return :  
The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn.  
But listen ; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,  
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,  
“Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here :”

And would have passed in, gratified to gain  
That positive eternity of pain,  
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast :  
First leave your hopes behind ! — But years have passed  
Since I left all behind me, to the last :

You cannot count for hope with all your wit,  
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit :  
How could I seek to enter void of it ?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,  
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole  
Without the payment of the settled toll ?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest :  
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest ;  
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box ; whose lid shall shut,  
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it ; but  
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate ;  
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,  
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,  
Squares back his shoulders, breathes with all his might.  
And briskly paces forward strong and light :

But these, as if they took some burden, bowed ;  
The whole frame sank ; however strong and proud  
Before, they crept in quite infirm and cowed.

And as they passed me, earnestly from each  
A morsel of his hope I did beseech,  
To pay my entrance ; but all mocked my speech.

Not one would cede a tittle of his store,  
Though knowing that in instants three or four  
He must resign the whole for evermore.

So I returned. Our destiny is fell;  
For in this Limbo we must ever dwell,  
Shut out alike from Heaven and Earth and Hell.

The other sighed back, Yea ; but if we grope  
With care through all this Limbo's dreary scope,  
We yet may pick up some minute lost hope :

And, sharing it between us, entrance win,  
In spite of fiends so jealous for gross sin :  
Let us without delay our search begin.

## VII

SOME say that phantoms haunt those shadowy streets,  
And mingle freely there with sparse mankind;  
And tell of ancient woes and black defeats,  
. And murmur mysteries in the grave enshrined :  
But others think them visions of illusion,  
Or even men gone far in self-confusion ;  
No man there being wholly sane in mind.

And yet a man who raves, however mad,  
Who bares his heart and tells of his own fall,  
Reserves some inmost secret good or bad :  
The phantoms have no reticence at all :  
The nudity of flesh will blush though tameless,  
The extreme nudity of bone grins shameless,  
The unsexed skeleton mocks shroud and pall.

I have seen phantoms there that were as men  
And men that were as phantoms flit and roam ;

Marked shapes that were not living to my ken,  
Caught breathings acrid as with Dead Sea foam :  
The City rests for man so weird and awful,  
That his intrusion there might seem unlawful,  
And phantoms there may have their proper home.

## VIII

WHILE I still lingered on that river-walk,  
And watched the tide as black as our black doom,  
I heard another couple join in talk,

And saw them to the left hand in the gloom  
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,  
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

“ I never knew another man on earth  
But had some joy and solace in his life,  
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife :  
My doom has been unmitigated dearth.”

“ We gaze upon the river, and we note  
The various vessels large and small that float,  
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat.”

“ And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil  
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth ;

But homely love with common food and health,  
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil."

"This all-too humble soul would arrogate  
Unto itself some signalizing hate  
From the supreme indifference of Fate!"

Who is most wretched in this dolorous place?  
I think myself; yet I would rather be  
My miserable self than He, than He  
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

"The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou  
From whom it had its being, God and Lord!  
Creator of all woe and sin! abhorred,  
Malignant and implacable! I vow

"That not for all Thy power furled and unfurled.  
For all the temples to Thy glory built,  
Would I assume the ignominious guilt  
Of having made such men in such a world."

" As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,  
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,  
As to produce men when He might refrain !

" The world rolls round forever like a mill ;  
It grinds out death and life and good and ill :  
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

" While air of Space and Time's full river flow  
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so :  
It may be wearing out, but who can know ?

" Man might know one thing were his sight less dim :  
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,  
That it is quite indifferent to him.

" Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith ?  
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,  
Then grinds him back into eternal death."

IX

IT is full strange to him who hears and feels,  
When wandering there in some deserted street.  
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,  
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet :  
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth ?  
Who in this city of the stars abideth  
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet ?

The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky  
As it comes on ; the horses snort and strain,  
The harness jingles, as it passes by;  
The hugeness of an overburthened wain :  
A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges  
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges :  
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise ? whence, whither, and for whom ?  
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,

Bearing away to some mysterious tomb  
Or Limbo of the scornful universe  
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions  
Of all things good which should have been our portions,  
But have been strangled by that City's curse.

X

THE mansion stood apart in its own ground;  
In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,  
High trees about it, and the whole walled round:  
The massy iron gates were both withdrawn;  
And every window of its front shed light,  
Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still  
As all the countless bulks of solid gloom:  
Perchance a congregation to fulfil  
Solemnities of silence in this doom,  
Mysterious rites of dolour and despair  
Permitting not a breath of chant or prayer?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad  
Whereon lay still light from the open door;  
The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,  
Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor;

*and front*  
*and back*

And ample stairways rose to left and right  
Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,  
Nor any life throughout the maze discerned ;  
But each was hung with its funereal pall,  
And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,  
With picture or with statue or with bust,  
All copied from the same fair form of dust :

A woman very young and very fair ;  
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,  
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care  
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth :  
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,  
These shapes lit up that mausoléan night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,  
And reached an open oratory hung  
With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse ;  
Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung ;  
And one lay there upon a low white bed,  
With tapers burning at the foot and head :

The Lady of the images : supine,  
Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay :  
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine  
A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray :  
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white  
Surmounting the large altar left in night :—

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,  
In every one whereof thine image dwells,  
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,  
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,  
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,  
With eyes forever fixed upon that face,  
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there ;  
As patient as a statue carved in stone,  
Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move ;  
And something tells me thou wilt never wake,  
And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,  
Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,  
Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death.  
For either shall be ever at thy side,  
And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.—

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,  
Intent upon that uncorrupted face,  
Entranced except his moving lips alone :  
I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.  
This was the festival that filled with light  
That palace in the City of the Night.

XI

WHAT men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,  
And fill their living mouths with dust of death,  
And make their habitations in the tombs,  
And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,  
And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error  
To reach that void of darkness and old terror  
Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith?

They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,  
They have much goodness yet they do not well,  
(The fools we know have their own Paradise,  
The wicked also have their proper Hell) ;  
They have much strength but still their doom is stronger,  
Much patience but their time endureth longer,  
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane :  
An outward madness not to be controlled ;

1. DEFENDED "THIS IS A GOOD AND USEFUL BOOK"  
2. WOULD NOT RECOMMEND IT TO ANYONE WHO HAS  
NOT READ THE PRACTICAL AND USEFUL WORKS  
OF FREDERIC DODD, OR THOSE OF HENRY C.  
THOMAS, ALSO, RECOMMEND IT.

3. RECOMMENDED "THIS IS A GOOD AND USEFUL WORK"  
4. RECOMMENDED "THIS IS A GOOD AND USEFUL WORK"  
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8. RECOMMENDED "THIS IS A GOOD AND USEFUL WORK"  
9. RECOMMENDED "THIS IS A GOOD AND USEFUL WORK"

## XII

OUR scattered hosts could be brought  
To act together for some common end?  
For one by one, each silent with his thought,

I marked a long loose line upon and wend  
Athwart the great cathedral's clustered square  
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow on among the last  
And in the pool of a shaft of light I stood  
Who challenged said, "The last of all is passed  
With deep eyes looking far, and a dark mouth told  
Whence come you in the world of life and light  
To this our City of Tremendous Night?" —

From pleading in a senate of deadards  
For some scant justice to our unfitness arises  
Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene  
Of opium visions, with a heart serene  
And intellect miraculously bright :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee  
By my transcendent feats of mimicry,  
And humour wanton as an elfish sprite :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,  
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable  
Of love and adoration and delight :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne  
A nation which beneath my rule has grown  
Year after year in wealth and arts and might :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith  
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,

Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-white :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

"

From drinking fiery poison in a den  
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,  
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace  
First Eden and the parents of our race,  
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan  
To justify the ways of God to man,  
And show how ill must fade and perish quite .  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From desperate fighting with a little band  
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,  
To free our brethren in their own despite :  
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,  
Each one responded with his countersign.  
Then entered the cathedral ; and in turn  
I entered also, having given mine ;  
But lingered near until I heard no more,  
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII

O F all things human which are strange and wild  
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,  
And showeth man most utterly beguiled.

To those who haunt that sunless City's range;  
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating  
How Time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,  
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days :  
The burden of the months he scarce can bear ;  
And often in his secret soul he prays  
To sleep through barren periods unaware.  
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure :  
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,  
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make  
Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us ;

This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,  
Wounded and slow and very venomous;  
Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and ocean,  
Distilling poison at each painful motion,  
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright  
The little time here given him in trust,  
But wasteth it in weary undelight  
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust,  
He naturally claimeth to inherit  
The everlasting Future, that his merit  
May have full scope; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,  
O nights that are as æons of slow pain.  
O Time, too ample for our vital powers,  
O Life, whose woeful vanities remain  
Immutable for all of all our legions  
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,  
Not of your speed and variance we complain.

We do not ask a longer term of strife,  
Weakness and weariness and nameless woes ;  
We do not claim renewed and endless life  
When this which is our torment here shall close,  
An everlasting conscious inanition !  
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,  
Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

## XIV

LARGE glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,  
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there;  
And all was hush: no swelling organ-strain,  
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer;  
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,  
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls  
Leaned men and shadows: others seemed to brood  
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.

Perchance they were not a great multitude  
Save in that city of so lonely streets  
Where one may count up every face he meets.

All patiently awaited the event  
Without a stir or sound, as if no less  
Self-occupied, doomstricken, while attent.  
And then we heard a voice of solemn stress

From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met  
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet :

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes  
Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow ;  
The head behind it of enormous size.

And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,  
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,  
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed : —

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark !  
O battling in black floods without an ark !

O spectral wanderers of unholy Night !  
My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,  
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears :

Oh, dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light !

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale ;  
Your woe hath been my anguish ; yea, I quail  
And perish in your perishing unblest.

And I have searched the hights and depths, the scope  
Of all our universe, with desperate hope  
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,  
Witnessed by every dead and living thing;

Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:  
There is no God; no Fiend with names divine  
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,  
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,  
That living Person conscious and supreme,  
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life;  
Whom we must curse because the life He gave  
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,  
Could not be killed by poison or by knife.

This little life is all we must endure,  
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,  
We fall asleep and never wake again;  
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,  
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh  
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus ; and all our wretched race  
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place  
    To other beings, with their own time-doom :  
Infinite æons ere our kind began ;  
Infinite æons after the last man  
    Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.

We bow down to the universal laws,  
Which never had for man a special clause  
    Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate :  
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,  
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,  
    Is it by favour or by wrath of Fate ?

All substance lives and struggles evermore  
Through countless shapes continually at war,  
    By countless interactions interknit :  
If one is born a certain day on earth,  
All times and forces tended to that birth,  
    Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe  
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse ;  
I find alone Necessity Supreme ;  
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,  
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark  
For us the flitting shadows of a dream.

O Brothers of sad lives ! they are so brief ;  
A few short years must bring us all relief :  
Can we not bear these years of labouring breath ?  
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,  
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,  
Without the fear of waking after death.—

The organ-like vibrations of his voice  
Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away ;  
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice  
Was sad and tender as a requiem lay :  
Our shadowy congregation rested still  
As brooding on that “ End it when you will.”

XV

WHEREVER men are gathered, all the air  
Is charged with human feeling, human thought ;  
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and prayer,  
Are into its vibrations surely wrought ;  
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,  
Are breathed into it with our respiration ;  
It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,  
As if alone on mountains or wide seas ;  
But nourishes warm life or hastens death  
With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,  
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,  
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbours ;  
He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,  
Although not many exiles wander there,

With many a potent evil influence,  
Each adding poison to the poisoned air ;  
Infections of unutterable sadness,  
Infections of incalculable madness,  
Infections of incurable despair.

XVI

OUR shadowy congregation rested still,  
As musing on that message we had heard  
And brooding on that "End it when you will;"  
Perchance awaiting yet some other word;  
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky  
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry:—

The man speaks sooth, alas! the man speaks sooth:  
We have no personal life beyond the grave;  
There is no God; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth:  
Can I find here the comfort which I crave?

In all eternity I had one chance,  
One few years' term of gracious human life:  
The splendours of the intellect's advance,  
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife;

The social pleasures with their genial wit;  
The fascination of the worlds of art,

The glories of the worlds of nature, lit  
By large imagination's glowing heart;

The rapture of mere being, full of health;  
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,  
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,  
The reverend age serene with life's long truth:

All the sublime prerogatives of Man;  
The storied memories of the times of old,  
The patient tracking of the world's great plan  
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before;  
For me the infinite Past is blank and dumb:  
This chance recurreth never, nevermore;  
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,  
A mockery, a delusion; and my breath  
Of noble human life upon this earth  
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,  
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,  
I worse than lose the years which are my all :  
What can console me for the loss supreme ?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,  
Speak not at all : can words make foul things fair ?  
Our life 's a cheat, our death a black abyss :  
Hush and be mute envisaging despair. —

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle  
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close ;  
And none gave answer for a certain while,  
For words must shrink from these most wordless woes .  
At last the pulpit speaker simply said,  
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head : —

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus :  
This life itself holds nothing good for us,  
But it ends soon and nevermore can be ;  
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,  
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth :  
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

## XVII

**H**OW the moon triumphs through the endless nights !  
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel  
Their thick processions of supernal lights  
Around the blue vault obdurate as steel !  
And men regard with passionate awe and yearning  
The mighty marching and the golden burning,  
And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,  
Are glorified from vision as they pass  
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream :  
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass  
To restless crystals : cornice, dome, and column  
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn ;  
Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.  
  
With such a living light these dead eyes shine,  
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze

We read a pity, tremulous, divine,  
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays :  
Fond man ! they are not haughty, are not tender :  
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,  
They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflow'n,  
We should but find them worlds as sad as this,  
Or suns all self-consuming like our own  
Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss :  
They wax and wane through fusion and confusion :  
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion.  
The empyréan is a void abyss.

## XVIII

I wandered in a suburb of the north,  
And reached a spot whence three close lanes led down,  
Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth  
Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and low :  
The air above was wan with misty light,  
The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand lane and slowly trod  
Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went  
The humid leafage ; and my feet were shod  
With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,  
With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,  
So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware  
Of something crawling in the lane below ;  
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there  
That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow.  
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then  
To drag ; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned  
That it had been a man ; for at my tread  
It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,  
Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,  
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire  
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,  
An infamy for manhood to behold.  
He gasped all trembling. What, you want my prize ?  
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold  
And all that men go mad upon, since you  
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue ?

You think that I am weak and must submit ;  
Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,  
And you are dead as if I clove with it  
That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed ! betrayed !  
I fling this phial if you seek to pass,  
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.  
  
And then with sudden change, Take thought ! take thought !  
Have pity on me ! it is mine alone.

*The Drury-Llewelyn Page*

And so I think you'd have to laugh  
And just smile at the following in your own  
Fictional or actual or imaginary case:  
The method of launching the letter:

The Mail Bag (or the Letter Box)

You have a right to expect from this page  
An account of what may be right or wrong  
about the best way to get rid of your mail  
in public places like post boxes, post boxes  
and so forth and so forth.

Post Box (or Letter Box)

To find the address of the post office  
From which you'll proceed with the case  
It goes without saying that you'll send  
Your letter in right as you have to it  
Overfully written and perfectly good.

And so you may well be blessed with some  
Startling news indeed. It exists the fact  
That the addressed letter will not be sent,  
And damage the persons which have access to it.

And through my wastes in hallowed name  
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime

And I become a nursing son and pure

As infant cradled on its mother's knee  
Without a past, uncherished and secure

When if I say the luminous present life  
Would plunge it face full in all young breast  
And scream abomination hard to call to rest

He turned to start, and I retiring crushed

That shred of blossom from off my face  
And mused. His life would grow too soon uncrushed

He should not antedate my retrace  
And hide his elements in that large white  
Beyond the reach of man's eye, wing'd by me.

And ever thus what waste we were planned

To seek oblivion through the way of gate  
At birth when that of death is close at hand

For this is low, is low there be it Fate  
What never has been, yet may have it; when  
The thing which has been, never is again.

## XIX

THE mighty river flowing dark and deep,  
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides  
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep.  
Is named the River of the Suicides ;  
For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,  
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,  
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,  
As by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled ;  
Another wades in slow with purpose set  
Until the waters are above him furled ;  
Another in a boat with dreamlike motion  
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,  
To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,  
For none beholding them attempts to save.

The while each thinks how soon, solicitous,  
He may seek refuge in the self-same wave ;  
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance  
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance  
Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,  
Why actors and spectators do we stay ? —  
To fill our so-short *rôles* out right or wrong ;  
To see what shifts are yet in the dull play  
For our illusion ; to refrain from grieving  
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving :  
But those asleep at home, how blest are they !

Yet it is but for one night after all :  
What matters one brief night of dreary pain ?  
When after it the weary eyelids fall  
Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain ;  
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish  
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,  
That one best sleep which never wakes again.

## XX

I sat me weary on a pillar's base,  
And leaned against the shaft ; for broad moonlight  
O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,  
A shore of shadow slanting from the right :  
The great cathedral's western front stood there,  
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,  
Two figures faced each other, large, austere ;  
A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,  
An angel standing in the moonlight clear ;  
So mighty by magnificence of form,  
They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorim.

Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword  
The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held ;  
His vigilant, intense regard was poured  
Upon the creature placidly unquelled,

Whose front was set at level gaze which took  
No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposèd shapes  
My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon  
Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes  
The outworn to worse weariness. But soon  
A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,  
And from the evil lethargy I woke.

The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,  
And lay there shattered ; hence the sudden sound :  
A warrior leaning on his sword alone  
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound ;  
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware  
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,  
Again a clashing noise my slumber rent ;  
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet :  
An unarmed man with raised hands impotent  
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept  
Such mien as if with open eyes it slept.

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown ;  
A louder crash upstartled me in dread :  
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,  
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head  
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,  
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,  
And made the temple-front a mystic dream,  
And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,  
The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme :  
I pondered long that cold majestic face  
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

## XXI

**A** NEAR the center of that northern crest  
Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,  
From which the city east and south and west  
Sinks gently in long waves; and thronèd there  
An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,  
The bronze colossus of a wingèd Woman,  
Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,  
With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's might  
Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee;  
Across a clasped book in her lap the right  
Upholds a pair of compasses; she gazes  
With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes  
Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her ; but all men know  
That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought  
Three centuries and threescore years ago,  
With phantasies of his peculiar thought :  
The instruments of carpentry and science  
Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance  
With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught ;  
  
Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above ;  
The grave and solid infant perched beside,  
With open winglets that might bear a dove,  
Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed ;  
Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,  
But all too impotent to lift the regal  
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride ;  
  
And with those wings, and that light wreath which seems  
To mock her grand head and the knotted frown  
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and dreams,  
The household bunch of keys, the housewife's gown  
Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid  
As if a shell of burnished metal frigid,  
The feet thick-shod to tread all weakness down ;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,  
The massy rainbow curved in front of it  
Beyond the village with the masts and trees ;  
The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,  
Bearing upon its batlike leatheren pinions  
Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,  
The "MELENCOLIA" that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus  
Surrounded to expound her form sublime,  
Her fate heroic and calamitous ;  
Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,  
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,  
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration  
Of the day setting on her baffled prime.  
  
Baffled and beaten back she works on still,  
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,  
Sustained by her indomitable will :  
The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore,  
And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,  
Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre  
That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,  
With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,  
A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,  
More desperate than strife with hope debarred,  
More fatal than the adamantine Never  
Encompassing her passionate endeavour,  
Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard :

The sense that every struggle brings defeat  
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success ;  
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat  
Because they have no secret to express ;  
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain  
Because there is no light beyond the curtain ;  
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,  
That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,  
In bronze sublimity she gazes forth  
Over her Capital of teen and threne.  
Over the river with its isles and bridges,  
The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,  
Confronting them with a coëval mien.

The moving moon and stars from east to west  
Circle before her in the sea of air;  
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.  
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:  
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,  
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance  
And confirmation of the old despair.



## **APPENDIX**

NOTE. The impression made by *The City of Dreadful Night* is deepened by the testimony of the two poems appended: *To Our Ladies of Death* and *Insomnia*. The former was published in 1861, the latter in 1882; while the central and chief part of the trilogy was written during the years 1870-74. Time, the friend of man and forerunner of eternal life, was for this conquered soul a cruel enemy, war-lord of "his days and months and years."

In the more youthful chant of desperation, he is yet able to apotheosize Death — as in an antique moon-myth — a goddess in heaven, in hell and on earth. Or rather she has the three-fold divinity of Diana, whose gentle darts give sleep; of Venus, the world's delight and bane; and of the solemn Proserpine crowned with lethal poppies. In *The City of Dreadful Night* this pure fancy appears to be succeeded by a singular power of clothing grief — or its recurrent eidolons — in brilliant allegories.

At the end of two decades of endurance, Thomson's verse became an outcry of tortured nerves. In the poem *Insomnia* we find the author concerned with individual expression rather than with impersonation or with typical design. For him "life is one dark maze of dreams;" and "the sun-hours . . . the star-hours," are the black or lurid ridges of timeless Malebolge. The triune pathetic record of the malady of his spirit must win for his memory at once admiration and pity.

## TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH.<sup>1</sup>

1861.

"Tired with all these, for restful death I cry."

—SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnet 66.*

WEARY of erring in this desert Life,  
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,  
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,  
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,  
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,  
And pray to Thee, O ever-quiet Death !  
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

The strong shall strive,—may they be victors crowned;  
The wise still seek,—may they at length find Truth;  
The young still hope,—may purest love be found  
To make their age more glorious than their youth.  
For me; my brain is weak, my heart is cold,  
My hope and faith long dead; my life but bold  
In jest and laugh to parry hateful ruth.

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<sup>1</sup>The Three Ladies, suggested by the sublime sisterhood of Our Ladles of Sorrow, in the "Suspiria de Profundis" of De Quincey.

Over me pass the days and months and years  
 Like squadrons and battalions of the foe  
 Trampling with thoughtless thrusts and alien jeers  
 Over a wounded soldier lying low :  
 He grips his teeth, or flings them words of scorn  
 To mar their triumph ; but the while, outworn,  
 Inwardly craves for death to end his woe.

Thus I, in secret, call, O Death ! to Thee,  
 Thou Youngest of the solemn Sisterhood,  
 Thou Gentlest of the mighty Sisters Three  
 Whom I have known so well since first endued  
 By Love and Grief with vision to discern  
 What spiritual life doth throb and burn  
 Through all our world, with evil powers and good.

The Three whom I have known so long, so well,  
 By intimate communion, face to face,  
 In every mood, of Earth, of Heaven, of Hell,  
 In every season and in every place,  
 That joy of Life has ceased to visit me,  
 As one estranged by powerful witchery,  
 Infatuate in a Siren's weird embrace.

First Thou, O priestess, prophetess, and queen,  
 Our Lady of Beatitudes, first Thou :  
 Of mighty stature, of seraphic mien,  
 Upon the tablet of whose broad white brow  
 Unvanquishable Truth is written clear,  
 The secret of the mystery of our sphere,  
 The regnant word of the Eternal Now.

Thou standest garmented in purest white ;  
But from thy shoulders wings of power half-spread  
Invest thy form with such miraculous light  
As dawn may clothe the earth with : and, instead  
Of any jewel-kindled golden crown,  
The glory of thy long hair flowing down  
Is dazzling noonday sunshine round thy head.

Upon a sword thy left hand resteth calm,  
A naked sword, two-edged and long and straight ;  
A branch of olive with a branch of palm  
Thy right hand proffereth to hostile Fate.  
The shining plumes that clothe thy feet are bound  
By knotted strings, as if to tread the ground  
With weary steps when thou wouldest soar elate.

Twin heavens uplifted to the heavens, thine eyes  
Are solemn with unutterable thought  
And love and aspiration ; yet there lies  
Within their light eternal sadness, wrought  
By hope deferred and baffled tenderness :  
Of all the souls whom thou dost love and bless,  
How few revere and love thee as they ought !

Thou leadest heroes from their warfare here  
To nobler fields where grander crowns are won ;  
Thou leadest sages from this twilight sphere  
To cloudless heavens and an unsetting sun ;  
Thou leadest saints into that purer air  
Whose breath is spiritual life and prayer :  
Yet, lo ! they seek thee not, but fear and shun !

Thou takest to thy most maternal breast  
Young children from the desert of this earth,  
Ere sin hath stained their souls, or grief opprest,  
And bearest them unto an heavenly birth,  
To be the Vestals of God's Fane above:  
And yet their kindred moan against thy love,  
With wild and selfish moans in bitter dearth.

Most holy Spirit, first Self-conqueror;  
Thou Victress over Time and Destiny  
And Evil, in the all-deciding war  
So fierce, so long, so dreadful! — Would that me  
Thou hadst upgathered in my life's pure morn!  
Unworthy then, less worthy now, forlorn,  
I dare not, Gracious Mother, call on Thee.

Next Thou, O sibyl, sorceress and queen,  
Our Lady of Annihilation, Thou!  
Of mighty stature, of demoniac mien;  
Upon whose swarthy face and livid brow  
Are graven deeply anguish, malice, scorn,  
Strength ravaged by unrest, resolve forlorn  
Of any hope, dazed pride that will not bow.

Thy form is clothed with wings of iron gloom;  
But round about thee, like a chain, is rolled,  
Cramping the sway of every mighty plume,  
A stark constringent serpent fold on fold:  
Of its two heads, one sting is in thy brain,  
The other in thy heart; their venom-pain  
Like fire distilling through thee uncontrolled.

A rod of serpents wieldeth thy right hand ;  
Thy left a cup of raging fire, whose light  
Burns lurid on thyself as thou dost stand ;  
Thy lidless eyes tenebriously bright ;  
Thy wings, thy vesture, thy dishevelled hair  
Dark as the Grave; thou statue of Despair,  
Thou Night essential radiating night.

Thus have I seen thee in thine actual form ;  
Not thus can see thee those whom thou dost sway,  
Inscrutable Enchantress ; young and warm,  
Pard-beautiful and brilliant, ever gay ;  
Thy cup the very Wine of Life, thy rod  
The wand of more voluptuous spells than God  
Can wield in Heaven; thus charmest thou thy prey.

The selfish, fatuous, proud, and pitiless,  
All who have falsified life's royal trust ;  
The strong whose strength hath basked in idleness,  
The great heart given up to worldly lust,  
The great mind destitute of moral faith ;  
Thou scourgest down to Night and utter Death,  
Or penal spheres of retribution just.

O mighty Spirit, fraudulent and malign,  
Demon of madness and perversity !  
The evil passions which may make me thine  
Are not yet irrepressible in me ;  
And I have pierced thy mask of riant youth,  
And seen thy form in all its hideous truth :  
I will not, Dreadful Mother, call on Thee.

Last Thou, retirèd nun and thronelss queen,  
Our Lady of Oblivion, last Thou :  
Of human stature, of abstracted mien ;  
Upon whose pallid face and drooping brow  
Are shadowed melancholy dreams of Doom,  
And deep absorption into silent gloom,  
And weary bearing of the heavy Now.

Thou art all shrouded in a gauzy veil,  
Sombrous and cloudlike ; all except that face  
Of subtle loveliness though weirdly pale.  
Thy soft, slow-gliding footsteps leave no trace,  
And stir no sound. Thy drooping hands infold  
Their frail white fingers ; and, unconscious, hold  
A poppy-wreath, thine anodyne of grace.

Thy hair is like a twilight round thy head :  
Thine eyes are shadowed wells, from Lethe-stream  
With drowsy subterranean waters fed ;  
Obscurely deep, without a stir or gleam ;  
The gazer drinks in from them with his gaze  
An opiate charm to curtain all his days,  
A passive languor of oblivious dream.

Thou hauntest twilight regions, and the trance  
Of moonless nights when stars are few and wan :  
Within black woods ; or over the expanse  
Of desert seas abysmal ; or upon  
Old solitary shores whose populous graves  
Are rocked in rest by ever-moaning waves ;  
Or through vast ruined cities still and lone.

The weak, the weary, and the desolate,  
The poor, the mean, the outcast, the opprest,  
All trodden down beneath the march of Fate,  
Thou gatherest, loving Sister, to thy breast,  
Soothing their pain and weariness asleep ;  
Then in thy hidden Dreamland hushed and deep  
Dost lay them, shrouded in eternal rest.

O sweetest Sister, and Sole Patron Saint  
Of all the humble eremites who flee  
From out life's crowded tumult, stunned and faint,  
To seek a stern and lone tranquility  
In Libyan wastes of time : my hopeless life  
With famished yearning craveth rest from strife ;  
Therefore, thou Restful One, I call on Thee !

Take me, and lull me into perfect sleep ;  
Down, down, far-hidden in thy duskiest cave ;  
While all the clamorous years above me sweep  
Unheard, or, like the voice of seas that rave  
On far-off coasts, but murmuring o'er my trance,  
A dim vast monotone, that shall enhance  
The restful rapture of the inviolate grave.

Upgathered thus in thy divine embrace,  
Upon mine eyes thy soft mesmeric hand,  
While wreaths of opiate odour interlace  
About my pulseless brow; babe-pure and bland,  
Passionless, senseless, thoughtless, let me dream  
Some ever-slumbrous, never-varying theme,  
Within the shadow of thy Timeless Land.

That when I thus have drunk my inmost fill  
    Of perfect peace, I may arise renewed ;  
In soul and body, intellect and will,  
    Equal to cope with Life whate'er its mood ;  
To sway its storm and energise its calm ;  
Through rhythmic years evolving like a psalm  
    Of infinite love and faith and sanctitude.

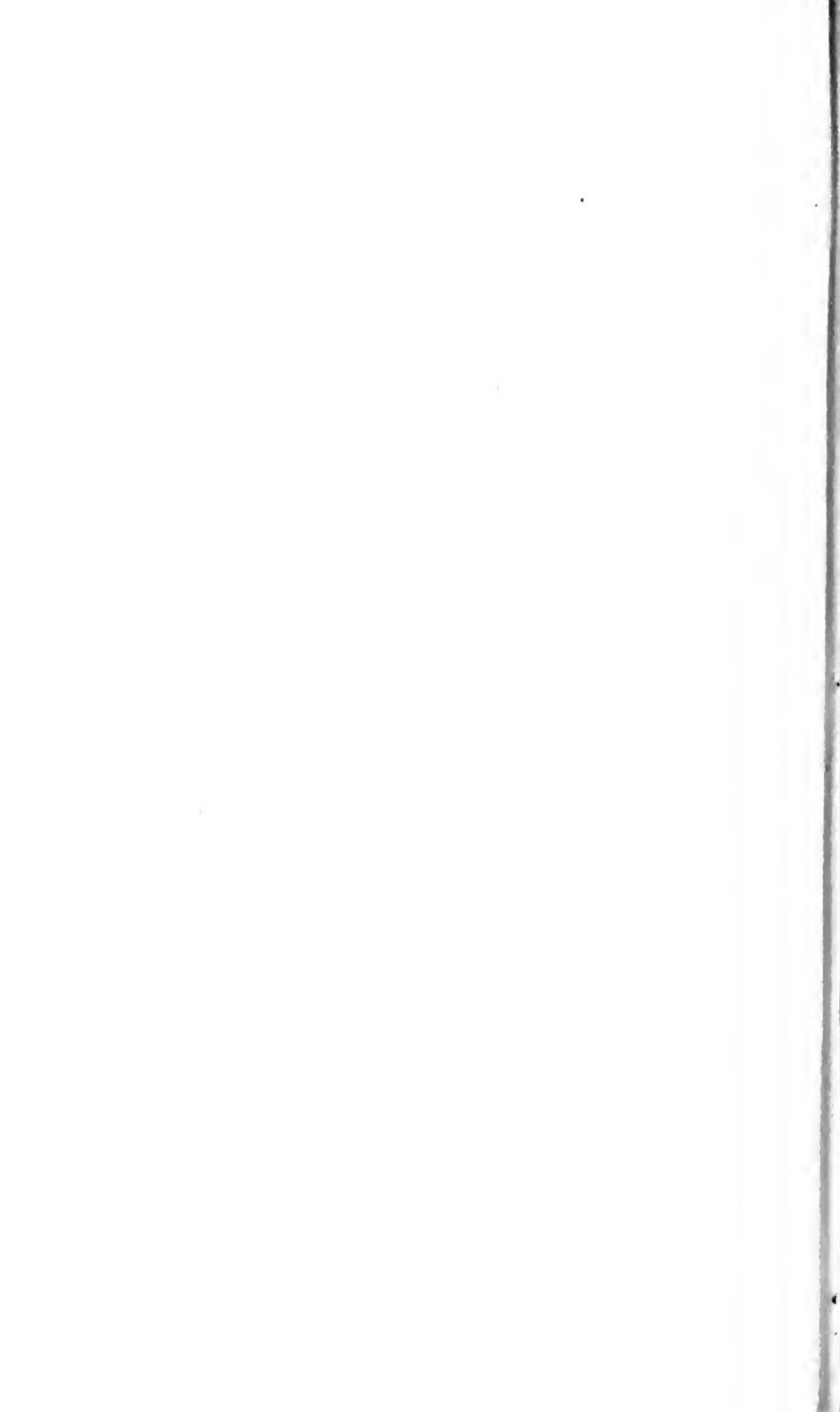
But if this cannot be, no less I cry,  
    Come, lead me with thy terrorless control  
Down to our Mother's bosom, there to die  
    By abdication of my separate soul :  
So shall this single, self-impelling piece  
Of mechanism from lone labour cease,  
    Resolving into union with the Whole.

Our mother feedeth thus our little life,  
    That we in turn may feed her with our death :  
The great Sea sways, one interwoven strife,  
    Wherfrom the Sun exhales a subtle breath,  
To float the heavens sublime in form and hue,  
Then turning cold and dark in order due  
    Rain weeping back to swell the Sea beneath.

One part of me shall feed a little worm,  
    And it a bird on which a man may feed ;  
One lime the mould, one nourish insect-sperm ;  
    One thrill sweet grass, one pulse in bitter weed ;  
This swell a fruit, and that evolve in air ;  
Another trickle to a springlet's lair,  
    Another paint a daisy on the mead :

With cosmic interchange of parts for all,  
Through all the modes of being numberless  
Of every element, as may befall.  
And if earth's general soul hath consciousness,  
Their new life must with strange new joy be thrilled,  
Of perfect law all perfectly fulfilled ;  
No sin, no fear, no failure, no excess.

Weary of living isolated life,  
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,  
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,  
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,  
I close my eyes and hush my panting breath,  
And yearn for Thee, divinely tranquil Death,  
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.



## INSOMNIA.

"Sleepless himself to give to others sleep."  
"He giveth His beloved sleep."

I heard the sounding of the midnight hour ;  
The others one by one had left the room,  
In calm assurance that the gracious power  
Of Sleep's fine alchemy would bless the gloom,  
Transmuting all its leaden weight to gold,  
To treasures of rich virtues manifold,  
New strength, new health, new life ;  
Just weary enough to nestle softly, sweetly,  
Into divine unconsciousness, completely  
Delivered from the world of toil and care and strife.

Just weary enough to feel assured of rest,  
Of Sleep's divine oblivion and repose,  
Renewing heart and brain for richer zest,  
Of waking life when golden morning glows,  
As young and pure and glad as if the first  
That ever on the void of darkness burst  
With ravishing warmth and light ;  
On dewy grass and flowers and blithe birds singing,  
And shining waters, all enraptured springing,  
Fragrance and shine and song, out of the womb of night.

But I with infinite weariness outworn,  
    Haggard with endless nights unblessed by sleep,  
Ravaged by thoughts unutterably forlorn,  
    Plunged in despairs unfathomably deep.  
Went cold and pale and trembling with affright  
    Into the desert vastitude of Night,  
        Arid and wild and black ;  
Foreboding no oasis of sweet slumber,  
    Counting beforehand all the countless number  
Of sands that are its minutes on my desolate track.

And so I went, the last, to my drear bed,  
    Aghast as one who should go down to lie  
Among the blissfully unconscious dead,  
    Assured that as the endless years flowed by  
Over the dreadful silence and deep gloom  
    And dense oppression of the stifling tomb,  
        He only of them all,  
Nerveless and impotent to madness, never  
    Could hope oblivion's perfect trance for ever :  
An agony of life eternal in death's pall.

But that would be for ever, without cure ! —  
    And yet the agony be not more great ;  
Supreme fatigue and pain, while they endure,  
    Into Eternity their time translate ;  
Be it of hours and days or countless years,  
    And boundless æons, it alike appears  
        To the crushed victim's soul ;  
Utter despair foresees no termination,  
    But feels itself of infinite duration ;  
The smallest fragment instant comprehends the whole.

The absolute of torture as of bliss  
Is timeless, each transcending time and space ;  
The one an infinite obscure abyss,  
The other an eternal Heaven of grace.—  
Keeping a little lamp of glimmering light  
Companion through the horror of the night,

I laid me down aghast  
As *he* of all who pass death's quiet portal  
Malignantly reserved alone immortal,  
In consciousness of bale that must for ever last.

I laid me down and closed my heavy eyes,  
As if sleep's mockery might win true sleep ;  
And grew aware, with awe but not surprise,  
Blindly aware through all the silence deep,  
Of some dark Presence watching by my bed,  
The awful image of a nameless dread :  
But I lay still fordone ;  
And felt its Shadow on me dark and solemn  
And steadfast as a monumental column.  
And thought drear thoughts of Doom, and heard the bells chime One.

And then I raised my weary eyes and saw,  
By some slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown  
And faint lamp-gleam, that Image of my awe,  
Still as a pillar of basaltic stone,  
But all enveloped in a sombre shroud  
Except the wan face drooping heavy-browed.  
With sad eyes fixed on mine ;  
Sad weary yearning eyes, but fixed remorseless  
Upon my eyes yet wearier, that were forceless  
To bear the cruel pressure; cruel, unmalign.

Wherfore I asked for what I knew too well:

O ominous midnight Presence. What art Thou?

Whereto in tones that sounded like a knell:

"I am the Second Hour, appointed now

To watch beside thy slumberless unrest."

Then I: Thus both, unlike, alike unblest:

For I should sleep, you fly:

Are not those wings beneath thy mantle moulded?

O Hour! unfold those wings so straitly folded,

And urge thy natural flight beneath the moonlit sky.

"My wings shall open when your eyes shall close

In real slumber from this waking drear;

Your wild unrest is my enforced repose;

Ere I move hence you must not know me here."

Could not your wings fan slumber through my brain,

Soothing away its weariness and pain?

"Your sleep must stir my wings:

Sleep, and I bear you gently on my pinions

Athwart my span of hollow night's dominions,

Whence hour on hour shall bear to morning's golden springs."

That which I ask of you, you ask of me.

O weary Hour, thus standing sentinel

Against your nature, as I feel and see

Against my own your form immovable:

Could I bring Sleep to set you on the wing,

What other thing so gladly would I bring?

Truly the Poet saith:

If that is best whose absence we deplore most,

Whose presence in our longings is the foremost,

What blessings equal Sleep save only love and death?

I let my lids fall, sick of thought and sense,  
But felt that Shadow heavy on my heart:  
And saw the night before me an immense  
Black waste of ridge-walls, hour by hour apart,  
Dividing deep ravines: from ridge to ridge  
Sleep's dying hour was an aerial bridge:  
But I, whose hours stood fast,  
Must climb down painfully each steep side hither,  
And climb more painfully each steep side thither,  
And so make one hour's span for years of travail last.

Thus I went down into that first ravine,  
Wearily, slowly, blindly, and alone,  
Staggering, stumbling, sinking depths unseen,  
Shaken and bruised and gashed by stub and stone:  
And at the bottom pavèn with slipperiness,  
A torrent-brook rushed headlong with such stress  
Against my feeble limbs,  
Such fury of wave and foam; and icy bleakness  
Buffetting insupportably my weakness  
That when I would recall, dazed memory swirls and swims.

How I got through I know not, faint as death:  
And then I had to climb the awful scarp,  
Creeping with many a pause for panting breath,  
Clinging to tangled root and rock-jut sharp;  
Perspiring with faint chills instead of heat,  
Trembling, and bleeding hands and knees and feet;  
Falling, to rise anew;  
Until, with lamentable toil and travel  
Upon the ridge of arid sand and gravel  
I lay supine half-dead and heard the bells chime Two:

And knew a change of Watchers in the room,  
 Without a stir or sound beside my bed ;  
 Only the tingling silence of the gloom,  
 The muffled pulsing of the night's deep dread ;  
 And felt an image mightier to appal,  
 And looked ; the moonlight on the bed-foot wall  
     And corniced ceiling white  
 Was slanting now ; and in the midst stood solemn  
 And hopeless as a black sepulchral column  
 A steadfast shrouded Form, the Third Hour of the night.

The fixed regard implacably austere,  
 Yet none the less ineffably forlorn.  
 Something transcending all my former fear  
 Came jarring through my shattered frame outworn :  
 I knew that crushing rock could not be stirred ;  
 I had no heart to say a single word,  
     But closed my eyes again ;  
 And set me shuddering to my task stupendous  
 Of climbing down and up that gulph tremendous  
 Unto the next hour-ridge beyond Hope's farthest ken.

Men sigh and plain and wail how life is brief :  
 Ah yes, our bright eternities of bliss  
 Are transient, rare, minute beyond belief,  
 Mere star-dust meteors in Time's night-abyss ;  
 Ah no, our black eternities intense  
 Of bale are lasting, dominant, immense,  
     As Time which is their breath ;  
 The memory of the bliss is yearning sorrow,  
 The memory of the bale clouds every morrow  
 Darkening through nights and days unto the night of Death.

No human words could paint my travail sore  
In the thick darkness of the next ravine,  
Deeper immeasurably than that before;  
When hideous agonies, unheard, unseen,  
In overwhelming floods of torture roll,  
And horrors of great darkness drown the soul,  
To be is not to be  
In memory save as ghastliest impression,  
And chaos of demoniacal possession. . . .  
I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime Three.

And like a pillar of essential gloom,  
Most terrible in stature and regard,  
Black in the moonlight filling all the room  
The Image of the Fourth Hour, evil-starred,  
Stood over me; but there was Something more,  
Something behind It undiscerned before, 1  
More dreadful than Its dread,  
Which overshadowed it as with a fateful  
Inexorable fascination hateful,—  
A wan and formless Shade from regions of the dead.

I shut my eyes against that spectral Shade,  
Which yet allured them with a deadly charm,  
And that black Image of the Hour, dismayed  
By such tremendous menacing of harm;  
And so into the gulph as into Hell;  
Where what immeasurable depths I fell,  
With seizures of the heart  
Whose each clutch seemed the end of all pulsation,  
And tremors of exanimate prostration,  
Are horrors in my soul that never can depart.

*Insomnia.*

If I for hope or wish had any force,  
 It was that I might rush down sharply hurled  
 From rock to rock until a mangled corse  
 Down with the fury of the torrent whirled,  
 The fury of black waters and white foam,  
 To where the homeless find their only home,  
 In the immense void Sea,  
 Whose isles are worlds, surrounding, unsurrounded,  
 Whose depths no mortal plummet ever sounded,  
 Beneath all surface storm calm in Eternity.

Such hope or wish was as a feeble spark,  
 A little lamp's pale glimmer in a tomb,  
 To just reveal the hopeless deadly dark  
 And wordless horrors of my soul's fixed doom :  
 Yet some mysterious instinct obstinate,  
 Blindly unconscious as a law of Fate,  
 Still urged me on and bore  
 My shattered being through the unfeared peril  
 Of death less hateful than the life as sterile :  
 I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime Four.

The Image of that Fifth Hour of the night  
 Was blacker in the moonlight now aslant  
 Upon its left than on its shrouded right ;  
 And over and behind It, dominant,  
 The Shadow not Its shadow cast its spell,  
 Most vague and dim and wan and terrible,  
 Death's ghastly aureole,  
 Pregnant with overpowering fascination,  
 Commanding by repulsive instigation,  
 Despair's envenomed anodyne to tempt the Soul.

I closed my eyes, but could no longer keep  
Under that Image and most awful Shade,  
Supine in mockery of blissful sleep,  
Delirious with such fierce thirst unallayed ;  
Of all worst agonies the most unblest  
Is passive agony of wild unrest :  
Trembling and faint I rose,  
And dressed with painful efforts, and descended  
With furtive footsteps and with breath suspended,  
And left the slumbering house with my unslumbering woes.

Constrained to move through the unmoving hours,  
Accurst from rest because the hours stood still ;  
Feeling the hands of the Infernal Powers  
Heavy upon me for enormous ill,  
Inscrutable intolerable pain,  
Against which mortal pleas and prayers are vain,  
Gaspings of dying breath,  
And human struggles, dying spasms yet vainer :  
Renounce defence when Doom is the Arraigner :  
Let impotence o' Life subside appeased in Death.

I paced the silent and deserted streets  
In cold dark shade and chillier moonlight grey ;  
Pondering a dolorous series of defeats  
And black disasters from life's opening day,  
Invested with the shadow of a doom  
That filled the Spring and Summer with a gloom  
Most wintry bleak and drear ;  
Gloom from within as from a sulphurous censer  
Making the glooms without for ever denser,  
To blight the buds and flowers and fruitage of my year.

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"How from those hideous Maliboges deep  
Ever could win back to upper earth,  
Restored to human nights of blessed sleep  
And healthy waking with the new day's birth?"  
How do men climb back from a swoon whose stress,  
Crushing far deeper than all consciousness,  
Is deep as deep death seems?  
Who can the steps and stages mete and number  
By which we re-emerge from nightly slumber?—  
Our poor vast petty life is one dark maze of dreams.

*March, 1882.*



# BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY

BERTRAM DOBELL AND J. M. WHEELER

LONDON

NOTE. Previous to the friendship contracted by MR. BERTRAM DOBELL with JAMES THOMSON, the chances were that his poetry had remained for years unpublished, in book form. Few and far between were readers who knew of its buried existence in the unpopular pages of fiercely agnostic journals and reviews.

MR. DOBELL's cordial appreciation changed all that, and to him more than to any other may be ascribed those gleams of prosperity and hopes of help known to the poet in his "lonesome latter years."

The present Bibliography, compiled with the assistance of MR. J. M. WHEELER, is therefore a fitting finale to this long series of kindly acts and undiminished regard for the fame of one who only desired to be known as "B. V."

*"Ergo in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale!"*

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- 3 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT AND OTHER POEMS. By James Thomson (B. V.). London: 196 Strand. 1880. Crown Svo, half-title, title, dedication and contents, 4 leaves and pp. 184.  
*(The edition of this work consisted of one thousand ordinary copies, and forty on large paper.)*
- 4 VANE'S STORY, WEDDAH AND OM-EL-BONAIN, AND OTHER POEMS. By James Thomson, author of "The City of Dreadful Night." London: Reeves & Turner, 196 Strand. 1881. Crown Svo, pp. viii and 184.  
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II

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Notes on Emerson, December 1.

1859.

The King's Friend, February 1.

A Few Words about Burns, April 1.

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April 16.

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1872.

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- A National Reformer in the Dog Days, July 12, 19.  
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Reverberations (a review), January 1.  
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The Pilgrimage to Kerlaar (From Heine), Feb. 12.  
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March 4.  
Carlist Reminiscences, March 11, 18, 25; April 1.  
Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress, and Other  
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The Three that Shall Be One, June 3.  
Beauchamp's Career (a review), June 3.  
A Few Words on the System of Spinoza, June 10.  
The Leeds Conferences, June 17.  
From Heine (a poem), June 24.  
William Godwin: his Friends and Contemporaries,  
by C. Kegan Paul (a review), June 24; July  
1 and 8.  
Seen Thrice: a London Study, July 8 and 15.  
The Bishop of London's Fund, July 15.  
Mr. Foote at the London Hall of Science, July 15.  
Christian Evidences, Popular and Critical, July 22, 29.  
Indolence: a Moral Essay, July 22, 29; August 5.  
The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, Aug. 5.  
From Heine (Questions), August 5.  
Some Muslim Laws and Beliefs, August 12, 19.  
Shameless, Kew Gardens, 1865 (verse), August 12.  
Sayings of Sigvat, August 19.  
Low Life (verse), August 19.  
Stray Thoughts, August 26.  
Among the Christians, August 26.

- The *Christian World* and the *Secularist* again, September 9.  
Pacchiarotto, by Robert Browning (a review), September 9.  
The Loreley (after Heine), September 9.  
Conversions Sudden and Gradual, September 16.  
The Easter Questions, September 16.  
Correspondence: September "Mr. G. J. Holyoake's Libels," September 16.  
On the Duty of Converts to Freethought, Sept. 23.  
The London School Board Elections, September 30.  
The *Coruhill Magazine* on Leopardi, September 30.  
From Heine (a poem), September 30.  
La Tentation de Saint Antoine par Gustave Flaubert (a review), September 30; October 7, 21, 28; November 4.  
The Primate on the Church and the World, Oct. 7.  
The *Daily News* on Materialism, October 7.  
From Heine (poems), October 14; November 4.  
Spiritism in the Police Court, November 11.  
The Huddersfield Prosecution of a "Medium," November 18.  
The London School Board Elections, December 9.  
An Inspired Critic on Shelley, December 9.  
Note of an English Republican on the Muscovite Crusade, by A. C. Swinburne (a review), December 30.

1877.

- Our Obstructions, January 6.  
Among the Christians, January 6.  
The Works of Francis Rabelais (a review), Jan. 6.  
In Our Forest of the Past, February 17.  
Song, "The Nightingale was not yet Heard," Feb. 17.  
Principal Tulloch on Personal Immortality, Feb. 24.

- Prof. Martineau and the Rev. H. H. Dobney on Prayer, March 3.  
 The Bi-centenary of Spinoza, M. Renan's Address, March 10.  
 The Discourses of Epictetus, translated by G. Long (a review), April 14, 21; May 5, 12.  
 SECULAR REVIEW AND SECULARIST.  
 Trois Contes, par Gustave Flaubert (a review), July 21, 1877.
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## V. COPE'S TOBACCO PLANT (LIVERPOOL).

For a full account of Thomson's connection with this journal see *Salt's Life*, pp. 129-133; 138-151; 167-174; 259. A complete set of the *Tobacco Plant*, 130 numbers, begins March, 1870, and ends January, 1881, and is now extremely scarce. Besides the articles named in our list Thomson also did a considerable amount of book reviewing for the *Plant*, more particularly the Smoke-room Table notices of "English Men of Letters." He also contributed "the last two or three mixtures, former mixer having lately died."

- 1 Stray Whiffs from an Old Smoker, Sept., 1875.
- 2 Charles Baudelaire on Hasheesh, October, 1875.
- 3 Theophile Gautier as Hasheesh-Eater, Nov., 1875.
- 4 A French Novel: *Un Homme Serieux*, by Charles de Bernard, December, 1875.
- 5 The Fair of St. Sylvester, January, 1876.
- 6 Saint Amant. Three articles, February, March, April, 1876.
- 7 Rabelais. Four articles, June, July, August, October, 1876.

- 8 Ben Jonson. Fourteen articles, November, December, 1876; January, February, March, May, June, August, September, October, November, December, 1877; January, March, 1878.
- 9 Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, March, 1877.
- 10 "You Love Tobacco Better," January, 1878.
- 11 John Wilson and the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Two articles, April, 1878, and May, 1879.
- 12 Tobacco Smuggling in the Last Generation. Seven articles, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, 1878.
- 13 The Tobacco Duties. Three articles, December, 1878; January, March, 1879.
- 14 "Social Notes" on Tobacco, January, 1879.
- 15 Tobacco at the Opera, February, 1879.
- 16 Tobacco Legislation in the Three Kingdoms. Thirteen articles, March, April, September, November, December, 1879; January, March, April, May, June, August, September, November, 1880.
- 17 An Old New Book (The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,—a memorable critique), May, 1879.
- 18 James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. Three articles, August, September, October, 1879.
- 19 George Meredith's New Work (The Egoist), January, 1880.
- 20 Walt Whitman. Five articles, May, June, August, September, December, 1880.

This was never completed, owing to the discontinuance of the *Plant*; but two other articles were written, which are still in MS.

## 21 A Sergeant's Mess Song, November, 1880.

In addition to these he contributed to a Christmas publication issued in connection with the *Plant* in 1878, called "The Plenipotent Key to Cope's Correct Card of the Peerless Pilgrimage to Saint Nicotine of the Holy Herb," "The Pilgrimage to Saint Nicotine," in verse; and (probably) the introductory "Prologue" in prose.

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## VI. THE LIBERAL (LONDON).

1879.

In the Valley of Humiliation, January.

Two Leaves of a Fadeless Rose of Love (Two excerpts from a still unpublished poem called "Ronald and Helen"), January.

Professor Huxley on Hume, March.

Translations from Heine (two poems), May.

Meeting Again, June.

The Lover's Return (two more excerpts from "Ronald and Helen"), July.

The Purple Flower of the Heather (reprinted from *Tait*), August.A Strange Book (four articles on Dr. J. J. Garth Wilkinson's *Improvisations from the Spirit*), September, October, November, December.The Cypress and the Roses (reprinted from *Tait*), October.

## VII. PROGRESS (LONDON).

1884.

Bill Jones on Prayer, August.

A Real Vision of Sin (poem, written in 1859), Nov.

A Graveyard (epigram), December.

1885.

Supplement to the *Inferno*, February.

1886.

Siren's Song, March.

A Song of Sighing, April.

1887.

Sarpalus of Mardon, February, March, April, May,  
June.

This Magazine contains many reprints  
from the *Secularist*, etc., which it has not been  
thought necessary to specify.

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### VIII. VARIOUS MAGAZINES AND PERIODICALS.

#### 1 DAILY TELEGRAPH (LONDON):

"Middle Class Education," July 19, 1864.

In 1864 he had written two or three articles  
for the *Daily Telegraph*. *Salt's Life*, p. 69.

#### 2 FRAZER'S MAGAZINE:

Sunday up the River, October, 1869.

#### 3 NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S ALMANAC:

Notes on Religious Matters, 1872.

Some Anecdotes of Rabelais, 1876.

#### 4 NEW YORK WORLD:

(Three letters in August, 1873, were contributed by Thomson, from Spain, where he had been sent as a special correspondent to report the movements of the Carlists. *Salt's Life*, pp. 98-102.)

## 5 FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW:

The Deliverer, November, 1881 (written in 1859).

A Voice from the Nile, July, 1882.

Proem, February, 1892 (written in 1882).

## 6 ATHENÆUM:

Notes on the Structure of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, September 17, 24; October 8; November 5, 19, 1881.

## 7 GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE:

"The Ring and the Book," December, 1881

## 8 WEEKLY DESPATCH:

1882.

Law v. Gospel, March 26.

The Old Story and the New Storey, April 2.

The Closure, April 30.

Despotism tempered by Dynamite, June 4.

9 BROWNING SOCIETY'S TRANSACTIONS, Part I,  
1882:

Notes on the Genius of Robert Browning

## III

## CRITICISM AND BIOGRAPHY.

## I. BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS.

- 1 AMY LEVY'S "A MINOR POET," 1884.

(Thomson is the subject of the leading poem.)

- 2 THE ENGLISH POETS. Edited by T. H. Ward, 1885.

(Notice of Thomson, by Philip Bourke Marston, and excerpts from the "The City of Dreadful Night," Vol. IV., pp. 621-628.)

- 3 A NIRVANA TRILOGY; Three Essays on the Career and the Literary Labors of James Thomson. By William MacCall. Crown 8vo., pp. 32, n.d. [1886].

- 4 STEDMAN'S VICTORIAN POETS. Latest edition, 1887.

- 5 ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA. Ninth edition  
(Notice of Thomson, by William Sharp, 1888.)

- 6 LITERARY SKETCHES. BY H. S. SALT, 1888.  
(Contains a reprint of the article previously published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.)

- 7 THE LIFE OF JAMES THOMSON (B. V.), with a selection from his Letters, and a Study of his Writings. By H. S. Salt, author of "Literary Sketches," etc. London: Reeves &

Turner, 196 Strand, and Bertram Dobell, Charing Cross Road. 1889. 8vo., pp. vii and 335, with a portrait.

(One thousand copies of this book were printed, but six hundred of them were destroyed by fire.)

- 8 ROSES AND RUE. BY W. STEWART ROSS, 1890.

(Containing the author's recollections of Thomson.)

- 9 THE POETS AND POETRY OF THE CENTURY.  
Edited by A. H. Miles, 1<sup>8</sup>92, Vol. V.
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II. ARTICLES IN MAGAZINES AND PERIODICALS:

- 1 NOTE ON "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT."  
*Academy*, June 6, 1874.
- 2 A NECESSITARIAN POET, *Spectator*. June 20, 1874.
- 3 REVIEW OF "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT."  
*Athenæum*, May 1, 1880.
- 4 REVIEW OF "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT."  
*Academy*, June 12, 1880.
- 5 A NEW POET. By G. A. Simcox. *Fortnightly Review*, July, 1880.
- 6 REVIEW OF "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT."  
*London Quarterly Review*, April, 1881.
- 7 THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT AND OTHER POEMS. By Philip Bourke Marston. *Modern Thought*, May, 1881.
- 8 A NEW ENGLISH POET. By Joel Benton. *Appleton's Journal*, May, 1881.
- 9 OBITUARY NOTICE OF THOMSON. By Philip Bourke Marston, *Athenæum*, June 10, 1882.

- 10 JAMES THOMSON: A STUDY. By G. G. Flaws, *Secular Review*, June 24 and July 1, 1882.
- 11 A POET OF TO-DAY. (James Thomson.) *To-day*, July, 1883.
- 12 JAMES THOMSON.—I. The Man. II. The Poet. By G. W. Foote. *Progress*, April and June, 1884.
- 13 A GREAT POET'S PROSE. By S. Briton. *Progress*, December, 1884.
- 14 THE WORKS OF JAMES THOMSON (B. V.). By H. S. Salt. *Gentleman's Magazine*. June, 1886. (*Reprinted in Salt's "Literary Sketches," 1888.*)
- 15 JAMES THOMSON. By Arthur C. Hillier. *Dublin University Review*, December, 1885.
- 16 CHILDISH RECOLLECTIONS OF JAMES THOMSON (B. V.). By Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner. *Our Corner*, August, 1886.
- 17 LETTERS OF JAMES THOMSON. By Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner. *Our Corner*, Sept., 1886.
- 18 WHY JAMES THOMSON DID NOT KILL HIMSELF. *Spectator*, March 23, 1889.
- 19 SOME EXTRACTS FROM JAMES THOMSON'S NOTE-BOOKS. By H. S. Salt. *Scottish Art Review*, August, 1889.
- 20 REVIEWS OF SALT'S "LIFE OF JAMES THOMSON." *Athenaeum*, March 16; *Academy*, April 13; *Agnostic Journal*, April 6; *Saturday Review*, May 18; *National Reformer* (notice written by G. W. Foote), March 31, Apr. 7, 14, 21; *The Freethinker* (notice written by J. M. Wheeler), February 10; *Watts' Literary Guide* (notice written by T. R. Wright), April 15, May 15, 1889.

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